

# Flying South: Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" in Three Stories by Flannery O'Connor<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract:

The influence of Edgar Allan Poe in many later authors is beyond any doubt. Themes, characters, locations, scenes, etc., have been used by writers belonging to a wide range of varieties. Among them, Flannery O'Connor acknowledged how Poe had influenced her fiction, and these influences can be traced through some of her most iconic pieces. This essay focuses on how O'Connor retold some of the key elements of the poem "The Raven" and included them in three of her short stories.

**Keywords:** Uncanny, failed intellectual, American Literature, the South, influence

The influence of Poe on many 20<sup>th</sup> century authors is beyond any doubt. (In the words of Joyce Carol Oates in her "Afterword" to *Haunted: Tales of the Grotesque*: "Who has *not* been influenced by Poe?" [Oates 1995, 305]). However, how these writers use Poesque resources, characters, locations etc., has been studied in so many different ways that more and more arguments can be added every year. From the icy mountains of Antarctica<sup>2</sup> to the shores of Lake Huron, where a modern-day Dupin and his African-American companion still try to solve mysteries,<sup>3</sup> the long shadow of Edgar Allan Poe continues falling on writers, texts, and audiences, as Benjamin Franklin Fisher claims:

Poe's Gothicism cast shadows over many later works of fantasy, science, and detective fiction –not to mention the numerous "modern Gothics" that continue to pour forth– just as it enters the work of Edith Wharton, William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor, Hart Crane, Stephen King, and much else (Fisher 2003, 91).

Burton Pollin also studies this phenomenon in his book *Poe's Seductive Influence on Great Writers* (2004), where he explores how Edgar Allan Poe has directly influenced many writers belonging to different genres from his contemporaries Herman Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne to more recent ones, like, for instance, Ernest Hemingway or Stephen King. Flannery O'Connor, even if not directly mentioned by Pollin, can be included in this group as a great and popular author.

Her literary achievements are nowadays beyond any doubt, and she began her career as a pulp author, as the first editions of her (probably) best known novel, *Wise Blood* (1952), prove.<sup>4</sup>

The relation of Flannery O'Connor to Poe has been demonstrated by studies such as Harold Bloom's *Flannery O'Connor* (1986), among others. The writer herself also recognized Edgar A. Poe as one of her main sources of inspiration. O'Connor, in a letter to "A" dated 28 August 1955, says about her reading:

The Slop period was followed by the Edgar Allan Poe period which lasted for years and consisted chiefly in a volume called *The Humerous<sup>5</sup> Tales* of E. A. Poe. These were mighty humerous – one about a young man who was too vain to wear his glasses and consequently married his grandmother by accident; another a fine figure of a man who in his room removed wooden arms, wooden legs, hair piece, artificial teeth, voice box, etc. etc.; another about the inmates of a lunatic asylum who take over the establishment and run it to suit themselves. This is an influence I would rather not think about (*HB* 98).<sup>6</sup>

The influence of Poe on O'Connor's works, as it will be argued through these pages, does not only come from *The Humerous Tales*, but from many other texts. For example, "The Black Cat" will explicitly appear in her novel *Wise Blood*, and in some of her short stories, like "Wildcat" (1947) and "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" (1955). At the end of *Wiseblood*, the main character, Hazel Motes, wraps himself with barbed wire and puts stones in his shoes to walk on them. His landlady criticizes his actions by using a Poesque reference:

'Well, it's not normal. It's like one of them gory stories, it's something that people have quit doing – like boiling in oil or being a saint or walling up cats,' she said. 'There's no reason for it. People have quit doing it' (*CW* 127).<sup>7</sup>

The reference here is to "The Black Cat."

This article shows how three of O'Connor's short stories ("Good Country People" [1955], "The Comforts of Home," and "The Lame Shall Enter First" [both 1965] invoke Poe's most famous poem, "The Raven," establishing a narrative continuum and presenting a collection of common characteristics.<sup>8</sup> I will focus on two characteristics: the "failed intellectual" and the presence of the uncanny, personified in "The Raven" by the black bird. I will also demonstrate how O'Connor rewrote "The Raven" as an exercise of memory. O'Connor stories portray characters who turn to writing in order to forget a difficult past, so she decided to turn to Poe as her model since he deals masterfully with this topic. However, Poe not only masters forgetting, he also invites the repressed past to come back, as the writers of Gothic novels had done before him. The repression of the past, and its unavoidable return has been one of the main topics of Gothic literature since its origins in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>9</sup> In the texts in question, the study of the past acts as a replacement for the loss of a

loved one. The inclusion of refrains in these texts can be understood as a means of remembering, bringing the forgotten mementos (uncanny and terrible) back to mind.

Before starting with the main topic that will be developed along this article, it is necessary to note how extensive the influence of "The Raven" has been. By considering Thomas Ollive Mabbott's words, it can be deduced that this poem has, at least, had the opportunity of influencing most of the major literatures in the world, as it has been known by any reader who has ever approached the work of Poe:

"The Raven" is Poe's most famous composition. Like the short stories, it was written to please all kinds of readers, and it was immediately successful. Not only was it copied in countless newspapers at once, but it soon was to be found in textbooks and anthologies. Since it is, despite all its elaborate metrical ornamentation, a straightforward narrative, it can be and has been translated into every major language. Woodberry wrote of it: "No great poem ever established itself so immediately, so widely, and so imperishably in men's minds" (Mabbott 2000, 350).

Some examples of what Mabbott explains in this quote (and of how his arguments have turned to be truer than he ever expected) can be extensively found, for instance, in the volume *Translated Poe* (edited by Emron Esplin and Margarida Vale de Gato, 2014). There, a whole part of the book is dedicated to how Poe's poetry and fiction have been translated. From French to Turkish and from Chinese to Icelandic, many examples are shown. However, when dealing with translation, it is impossible not to mention how some (or many) of these translators, also writers themselves, have mined "The Raven" to create obscure winged creatures for their national literatures. For instance, Brazilian poet Joaquim Machado de Assis is said to have created new poems using Poe's "The Raven," besides offering a Portuguese translation in his "O Corvo" (1883), as Sérgio Luiz Prado Bellei explains:

The emphasis on Machado de Assis's version of "The Raven" as just another good or bad translation has prevented most critics from fully appreciating the significance of his interest in Poe's poem. One critic, however, had been shown any specific interest in "O Corvo," might have been the one exception in this critical trend (Prado Bellei 1989, 1).

Prado Bellei's notions of "montage" and "incorporation" are going to be important for the kind of argument I will try to develop here. Flannery O'Connor, as Curvello proves for the author of the *Ocidentais*, will take those elements, characters or scenes that seem to be useful for her purposes. By means of this resource, she aims to enrich her own literary tradition, creating a new product with the most relevant elements the previous work has to offer.

The influence of "The Raven" is not merely quantitative but also qualitative. Not just the amount the works influenced is important, but all the different ways writers have used to "rewrite" this magnificent piece. For instance, George Monteiro, when dealing with the influence of Poe on

Portuguese author Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935), remarked three different usages of “The Raven.” These are the tendency to brevity, the aesthetic sense, and the concept of long poem.

For all the aforementioned circumstances, it is relevant to include this kind of study within the current theoretical debate. “The Raven” has been influencing (and haunting) writers’ minds for more than a century and a half. It is matter beyond literary transference. Analyzing how the poem influenced such a great author as Flannery O’Connor does not only refer to structural or thematic parallelisms, but to what a Southern author thought of (and valued from) a predecessor.

### **The Failed Intellectual**

The character of the failed intellectual is especially relevant when dealing with both Poe and Flannery O’Connor. Even if they are claimed today as two major examples of American *belles-lettres*, both had to suffer a kind of failure or another. In the case of Poe, it has to be born in mind that his writings did not begin to be wholly understood and valued until the turn of the century; on the other hand, Flannery O’Connor enjoyed professional success when she was alive. However, her failure came from her own condition. From 1952 on, lupus attacked her, and forced the writer to spend the rest of her life confined to her family farm in Milledgeville (Georgia).<sup>10</sup> This meant that she had to forget her recently inaugurated artistic career in the North to accept a “mediocre”<sup>11</sup> life which would animate her texts until the day of her death. This episode was later recreated in some of her stories, like “Everything That Rises Must Converge” or “The Enduring Chill” (1965). The presence of these intellectuals is not just notable by itself, but also because of the fact that all of them have to face (in some way or another) the presence of the uncanny, as will be seen below and as Poe’s student had to do before them. Although usually critics have associated the presence of these “failed intellectuals” (in the case of O’Connor) to the relation she maintained with her contemporary writers, many of them labelled as liberal,<sup>12</sup> this notion needs to be put into context. Even though she knew (and disagreed with) many of her colleagues, the idea of the intellectual (scholar, person who has devoted a whole life to the study) is one of the main thematic influences her works received from her life.<sup>13</sup> The character Asbury Fox returns from New York to his family farm in the South in “The Enduring Chill;” so too Flannery O’Connor was first attacked by her terrible illness during a journey back home. Joy/Hulga is unable to leave her mother’s house due to her poor health in “Good Country People;” O’Connor’s forays from her mother’s house were also very restricted.<sup>14</sup> Julian resents his mother’s attitude in “Everything That Rises Must Converge”; O’Connor letters at times reflect similar feelings, as she expresses in her letter to “A” dated 9 August 1955:

“If my mother were to come in during this process and say, ‘Turn of that light. It’s late,’ I with lifted finger and broad bland beatific expression, would reply, ‘On the contrary, I answer that the light being eternal and limitless, cannot be turned off. Shut your eyes,’ or some such thing” (*HB* 94-5).<sup>15</sup>

About this last issue, in 2002, R. Neil Scott, commenting a book by Bettina L. Knapp entitled *Women in Twentieth-Century Literature: A Jungian View* (University Park: Pennsylvania State

University Press, 1987), said about the chapter “Flannery O’Connor’s ‘Everything That Rises Must Converge’: Sacrifice, a Castration (87-101): “Submits that while O’Connor’s relationship with her mother ‘made terrible inroads’ on her emotional life, rather than allow herself to be destroyed in spirit, she ‘transfigured what festered within her’ into such artistic creations as this story [“Everything That Rises Must Converge”]” (Scott 2002, 362).

The opening of “The Raven” is specially revealing when attempting to configure what kind of scholar Poe imagined. Not much is known about the scholar or his life: only the fact of having previously lost his partner Lenore. Not even his age, his condition, or his areas of interest are depicted through the poem. The reader only receives a simple note of what the intellectual is doing during the fateful night he has to fight the raven:

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,  
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore,  
[...] (Poe 2000, 364).

Volumes have been written to answer the question “What was the scholar reading in Poe’s ‘The Raven?’” From classical and Judeo-Christian mythologies to ancient Nordic folklore and from history to occult sciences<sup>16</sup>, many explanations have been provided of what that “forgotten lore” was. However, it is not important here. This essay needs to focus only on the status of that lore: “forgotten.” The scholar seems to be interested in something that probably nobody else is studying at the same time. Applying present-day methods of literary research, the “School of memory” (belonging to the trend of Memory Studies, as Torsten Caeners explains [2015]) would say that Poe’s character is trying to create a new memory out of the things that are already gone.<sup>17</sup> As Torsten Caeners points out:

If remembering is the appearance of relations, the apparition of links, a resurgence of connections to the past in a present moment, memory is the bridge that facilitates the connection between these two temporalities (Caeners 2015, 284).

This detail, along with the fact of having lost Lenore and of being alone in a date around Christmas, as Byrd Howell Granger suggests: “[...] its share of the twelve days of Christmas [...]” (Granger 1972, 53), make him enter the category of failed intellectuals (and of failed person, too), who is not capable of even granting himself a companion during Christmas time

O’Connor’s protagonists in the selected stories (Joy/Hulga in “Good Country People,” Thomas in “The Comforts of Home,” and Sheppard in “The Lame Shall Enter First”) also accomplish these definitions, sharing many of their characteristics with Poe’s student. All of them have failed both in their professional and personal purposes.<sup>18</sup> More importantly, the three of them have dedicated many years to a “forgotten lore.” In the case of Joy/Hulga, Flannery O’Connor presents a Doctor in Philosophy who suffers from a heart condition; in words of Henry T.

Edmonson III: “[...] Hulga is a dilettante in nihilism, an amateur in ‘nothingness’” (Edmonson 2003-2004, 66). During her academic years, this scholar focused her research in the study of Nicolas Malebranche, a neglected Baroque philosopher who disserted widely on the topic of “the truth.”<sup>19</sup> Elizabeth Hubbard tries to acknowledge the meaning of the inclusion of this philosopher within O’Connor’s text, stating,

Yet there is also a significant degree of irony in Hulga’s appropriation of Malebranche, considering that she appropriates his methods of thinking and knowing without acknowledging or accepting any of the philosophical conclusions he reaches based upon a rational application of these methods, [...]. Again, we see her moral and intellectual blindness, her lack of self-understanding as well as of a clear-sighted intellectual understanding of the thinkers with whom she claims to engage and upon whose work she attempts to justify her solipsistic existence (Hubbard 2011, 58).

Perhaps the French author could be among the texts Poe’s student keeps in his room, for he is seeking the truth and the sense of his life after Lenore’s disappearance. This search for truth, along with the mystic representation of the scholar (alike Malebranche himself) makes this statement possible. O’Connor wants to point out a contradiction in this character: Joy/Hulga has a vast knowledge in the probably least useful field for the life she must have.<sup>20</sup> Her lore is doubly forgotten, for she not only studies a forgotten author but one who is completely irrelevant to her life and surroundings. Then both scholars share the characteristic of intellectual isolation and despair that will lead them to embrace what they think is hope.<sup>21</sup> That is why Poe’s character, after having heard the raven tapping at his chamber door, asks “Lenore?” (Poe 2000, 365); that will also be the reason why O’Connor’s character will accept Manley Pointer and will trust him to the point of giving him her wooden leg. A common characteristic shared by O’Connor’s characters and Poe’s scholar is that they are trying to forget someone’s death. In the case of Joy/Hulga, she tries to keep her mind away from her own demise, since it can happen at any moment because of her heart illness: “The doctors had told Mrs. Hopewell that with the best of care, Joy might see forty-five. She had a weak heart” (*CS* 276). Since the diagnosis is given, the young scholar tries to confront it with the means at her disposal, as does Poe’s character. Books become a weapon for both of them because the reading of themes nobody else is interested in (Malebranche?) can make them feel closer to the lost beloved Lenore and to what she understands (or desires) as a normal life, respectively:

Joy had made it plain that if it had been for this condition, she would be far from these red hills and good country people. She would be in a university lecturing to people who knew what she was talking about (*CS* 276).

By using this parallelism, Poe and O’Connor compose terribly hard scenes: two intellectuals, forgotten by the world, have to focus on a “forgotten lore” to keep alive something in which nobody else is interested. They have to face the fact that no one is going to care about their troubles, so they

create their own route out of hopelessness. In the case of Thomas, not even his mother is able to understand him:

Had she been in any degree intellectual, he could have proved to her from early Christian history that not excess in virtue is justified, that a moderation of good produces likewise a moderation in evil, that if Antony of Egypt had stayed at home and attended to his sister, no devils would have plagued him (CS 385-86).

As Philip Edward Phillips states for the scholar of "The Raven," but easily applicable to the rest of the intellectuals included in this study, "The speaker himself is the sole mourner, whose utterances echo through the darkness" (Phillips 2008, 78).

Thomas, from "The Comforts of Home," has also spent most of his life studying a forgotten lore. As said at the beginning of the story, he is a historian with a focus on local history. Once again, it is possible to find how this character is assimilated to Poe's scholar in "The Raven," since History is one of the most suitable topics to be located among his library. Books concerning past events compose the most forgotten of lores. Once again, too, as seen for the previously mentioned story, Thomas is an expert in a doubly forgotten lore. History affects the past, what provokes a great sense of forgetfulness; besides, the local history he studies will never be known or studied by anyone else beyond the borders of his community. As the scholar created by Poe, Thomas is alone; his knowledge is his only solace. As seen for Joy/Hulga, and as it will be seen for Sheppard, Thomas's focus on History is also an attempt to forget. Actually, later in the story, the reader gets to know that Thomas's father has died, and that his presence still haunts the house and the young historian. By means of study (as Poe's character) Thomas tries both to keep his mind busy and to keep his father's memory alive. That's why his reaction against Star Drake will be so disproportionate.

Finally, Sheppard is perhaps the most different of all these characters, since he has not dedicated his life to a "theoretical forgotten lore." His labor as social worker is not one of the "useless disciplines." However, as Flannery O'Connor conceives the story, Sheppard's activity (not an intellectual one, but one that needs a certain amount of theoretical formation) is as useless as Joy/Hulga's PhD. That does not mean that Sheppard is only a theoretical social worker, but that his efforts are forgotten by those who he tried to help. This case is probably the most despairingly terrible among the ones included in this essay. Even if Sheppard has relatives (so he is not alone), his attitude leads him to live an isolated life. As Poe's scholar, O'Connor's social worker decides to isolate himself from the society and the outer world, only focusing on his labor. Besides, there is a detail that links Sheppard with the previously analyzed characters and to Poe's one: he is also trying to forget someone. Indeed, it is mentioned that his wife has died shortly before, leaving him and his ten-year-old son on their own. At one point, he confesses his dedication in his job is to make this task easier:

“Don’t you think I’m lonely without her too?” Sheppard said. “Don’t you think I miss her at all? I do, but I’m not sitting around moping. I’m busy helping other people. When do you see me just sitting around thinking about my troubles?” (*CS* 448).

Then, Sheppard’s beneficiaries those “other people,” turn out to be like Poe’s student’s books; they are just tools these characters are using to forget their pain and their deceased loved ones. Both study and helping people have become vices.

These “failed intellectuals” offer a very interesting interpretations when analyzed through the lens of the so-called “School of Memory” or Memory Studies. All of them try to recover a forgotten (or in danger of being forgotten) past, and all of them also use the resources their education has given them to construct false memories. By means of education, all these characters forge an ideal past prior to the moment of grace that changed everything. As the next section proves, this moment of graces, specifically applied to these stories, is narrowly linked to the presence of the uncanny, since it will be used to trigger the underlying tragedy.

### **The Presence of the Uncanny**

Besides the high importance of the figure of the failed intellectual, the presence of the uncanny is, beyond any doubt, the most important characteristic shared by these four texts. They have not only in common a “foreign” element appeared to disturb the main character’s life, but also how this sense of uncanniness is built both by Edgar Allan Poe and Flannery O’Connor, being it possible to find a quasi-parallel structure between them. Even though the presence of the uncanny has affected almost every single kind of literature (at least belonging to the Western canon), the implications this concept has in the analyzed works and authors make it a key element to understand the interrelations between these texts.

As any reader of Poe would recall, the raven included in the eponymous poem perfectly accomplishes the Freudian description of the uncanny:

The German Word *unheimlich* is obviously the opposite of *heimlich*, *heimsch* – meaning ‘familiar’, ‘native’, ‘belonging to the home’; and we are tempted to conclude that what is ‘uncanny’ is frightening precisely because it is not known and familiar. Naturally not everything which is new and unfamiliar is frightening, however; the relation cannot be inverted. We can only say that what is novel can easily become frightening and uncanny; some new things are frightening but not by any means all (qtd. in Sage 1990, 76).

As Hoffmann’s *Sandman*, Gothic literature’s ghosts, or (later) Flannery O’Connor’s wildcat, Poe’s raven is an unknown entity coming from an unknown place beyond the borders of human understanding. As some critics have noticed, the home of this bird is possibly located in Hell, as Byrd Howell Granger explains:



For it is the folkloric connotation of the raven as the Devil's bird and as one of the forms he takes upon occasion for convenience which makes clear exactly why the young man will never again see his lost Lenore (Granger 1972, 53).

Even if the possible location of the raven in Hell does not constitute an uncanny element *per se*, due to the theological implications of the reference, this contributes to enhance one of the characteristics the uncanny usually shows: its ability to awaken terror and horror in the reader. The (possibly) unknown or (possibly) hellish origin of the bird make the scholar feel a most obvious horror as he would suffer if he knew the source of his unease.

Before starting with the explanation about the parallel structure of the texts, it is worth mentioning that the four uncanny elements are representatives of religion.<sup>22</sup> The raven, as seen above, can be assimilated to the Devil; Manley Pointer is a *Bible* salesman; Flannery O'Connor directly refers to the Devil through the narrator of "The Comforts of Home:" "The devil for Thomas was only a manner of speaking, but it was a manner appropriate to the situations his mother got into" (CS 385); and Rufus Johnson is a fundamentalist Christian who wishes to be a preacher, as his grandfather was. It is interesting to note how Flannery O'Connor used her knowledge of Christian Theology to compose this religion-related uncanny. Even if religion is not usually considered a source of the uncanny, the way in which O'Connor depicts in several of her works (as something terrible and unfamiliar) turns it into an uncanny presence. In a letter to Cecil Dawkins (dated November 17, 1957), Flannery O'Connor, when discussing which authors had had an influence in her, writes: "All I have read of Isak Dinesen are the twelve *Gothic Tales* and some of them I like right much – the one where the old woman and the money change places – but I can't take much of her at one time" (HB 253). As known, the collection O'Connor mentions includes a story entitled "The Deluge at Norderney." This tale, depicting Cardinal Hamilcar von Schestedt, was conceived as a treatise on the Holy Ghost, probably one of the most uncanny elements of the Catholic religion.<sup>23</sup> One of the most relevant scenes that recreates the uncanniness of this element is the closing one of "The Enduring Chill," in which Asbury Fox is attacked by an unknown bird:

The fierce bird which through the years of his childhood and the days of his illness had been poised over his head, waiting mysteriously, appeared all at once to be in motion. Asbury blanched and the last film of illusion was torn as if by a whirlwind from his eyes. He saw that for the rest of his days, frail, racked, but enduring, he would live in the face of a purifying terror. A feeble cry, a last impossible protest escaped him. But the Holy Ghost, emblazoned in ice instead of fire, continued, implacable, to descend (CS 382).

Along the next section of the essay, the common characteristics these uncanny elements have will be analyzed. The first thing that needs to be envisioned is how the uncanny enters the life of the failed intellectual, who is the main character of the stories and the poem, but who will be pushed into the background as soon as the respective strange elements that appear on stage. Both "The

Raven” and Flannery O’Connor’s stories expose a situation in which the uncanny is somehow voluntarily led into the house (and then, into the life of the character).<sup>24</sup> All the analyzed characters also believe that they have nothing to fear from the uncanny element, since they are superior to it physically or intellectually (or both). Nevertheless, all of them will have to confront a force that is able to beat them in any field of their lives. If we remember Poe’s poem, it is said how, after a period of vacillation, the unnamed scholar allows the bird to enter his room:

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter,  
In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore;  
Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he;  
But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door –  
Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door –  
Perched, and sat, and nothing more. (Poe 2000, 366)

It is his action of opening his window and moving his curtains that permits the uncanny into his life. Without having any notice of it, this character (as it will be seen for the others) is commencing a radical turn towards his existence, by letting his greatest enemy cross the borders of his domain. After that inflection point, only disgraces will visit the character, ending with his physical and moral destruction.<sup>25</sup>

“Good Country People” is even clearer in this respect, since its main character, Joy/Hulga, not only endorses her mother’s decision of granting Manley Pointer access to her house, but she invites him to go with her to the barn,<sup>26</sup> thus sealing her own destruction:

“Ain’t there somewheres we can sit down sometime?” he murmured, his voice softening toward the end of the sentence.

“In the barn,” she said.

They made for it rapidly as if it might slide away like a train. It was a large two-story barn, cool and dark inside. The boy pointed up the ladder that led into the loft and said, “It’s too bad we can’t go up there.”

“Why can’t we?” she asked.

“Yer leg,” he said reverently.

The girl gave him a contemptuous look and putting both hands on the ladder, she climbed it while he stood below, apparently awestruck. She pulled herself expertly through the opening and then looked down at him and said, “Well, come on if you’re coming,” and he began to climb the ladder, awkwardly bringing the suitcase with him (CS 286).

Due to her superior intelligence, her time at college, and her heart disease, Joy/Hulga thinks that she is above any of the people that surround her; so, when Manly Pointer appears at her mother’s door with his black suitcase and his innocent face, she thinks he will be an easy victim, at least in a moral sense. Once again, circumstances prove otherwise, explaining that the only weak character is

Joy/Hulga herself. As seen for the raven, Manly Pointer (the uncanny agent) wants to go to the elevated place, to the only place where Joy/Hulga can truly be herself; once again, the main character allows him to do his will.

"The Comforts of Home" is the only discordant note. Thomas does not allow Star Drake into his house, but he tacitly accepts her.<sup>27</sup> Once Star Drake has been accepted within his domain, he behaves like any of the other characters: certainly, he wants to expel her, but he does not do anything for this to happen but complaining of his discomfort.

Finally, in "The Lame Shall Enter First," a similar scenario is depicted. Sheppard accepts Rufus in his house, even giving him a key to have free entrance, against the opinion of his only living relative: his son Norton. Even if the child clearly states he does not want Rufus with him, his father does not pay attention. As seen for the raven and the previous stories, Sheppard opens the doors of his house to something that he knows positively of being evil. One of the possibilities Poe's poem mentions is that the "visiter" is the disappeared Lenore. Either if the solution is this supernatural event, or what it is finally discovered to be (a wild huge black bird), the scholar can be sure that what is out of his chamber cannot do him good, physically or spiritually. In the same sense, Sheppard knows that Rufus has been a convicted juvenile offender:

"I gave Rufus a key to this house when he left the reformatory – to show my confidence in him and so he would have a place he could come to and feel welcome any time. He didn't use it, but I think he'll use it now when he's seen me and he's hungry. And if he doesn't use it, I'm going out and find him and bring him here" (CS 446).

Even with his antecedents, Sheppard invited the teenager to his house, where his 9-year-old son lives too. Once again, an educated person, a supposedly higher intelligence, opens the door to an unknown force, to something that is stronger than himself.

After the uncanny has entered the houses and lives of the characters, another common characteristic Poe's poem and O'Connor's stories shares is the freedom this uncanny element enjoys. Nobody can stop it, so its perverse influence is total. In a similar manner, the characters of the Gothic novel, in many cases, freely accepted the presence of the villain within their lives: Elvira invites Ambrosio to her house in *The Monk* (with the result of Antonia's rape and murder); John Melmoth invites Monçada to stay at his house (with the result of the horrible story about the man in the portrait); Jonathan Harker freely enters Dracula's castle, etc. As seen for "The Raven", the bird flies all around the room of the scholar, disturbing all his order and peace.

This freedom to fly can be easily assimilated to the freedom of movements the other uncanny characters enjoy. All of them have open access to their hosts' houses. Both their physical and their moral presence (but specially their actions: moral murder of Joy/Hulga, driving to madness of Thomas, and the provoked suicide of Norton) are like a shadow that darkens the whole micro-universe in which they land, as the shadow of Poe's raven darkened the scholar's room while flying.

The first story by Flannery O'Connor included in this essay also shows how, after receiving the invitation to enter the house, Manley Pointer is given a high freedom to move in the house. Under his disguise of Bibles salesman, no fear is apparently expected from a young, well-looking man. Even more, he is tacitly given a kind of authority to direct the action of the story for an amount of pages enough to draw a tragic outcome:

She looked up and down the empty highway and had the furious feeling that she had been tricked, that he had only meant to make her walk to the gate after the idea of him. Then suddenly he stood up, very tall, from behind a bush on the opposite embankment. Smiling, he lifted his hat which was new and wide-brimmed. He had not worn it yesterday and she wondered if he had bought it for the occasion. It was a toast-colored with a red and white band around it and was slightly too large for him. He stepped from behind the bush still carrying the black valise. He had on the same suit and the same yellow socks sucked down in his shoes from walking. He crossed the highway and said, "I knew you'd come!" (CS 284-85).

As seen for "The Raven," the wanderer has such a high authority over the situation that he can fabricate, the situation that pleases the most his perverse and dark interest (the wooden leg and the humiliation of the intellectual), as he has total control over it, even if Joy/Hulga thinks otherwise. Meanwhile, the rest of the characters are not conscious of their subjugation, they have forgotten about the couple (or, at least, O'Connor depicts it so). Poe's scholar believes he can expel the bird from his room; Joy/Hulga trust her intelligence to trick Manley Pointer.

Unlike the previous examples, in both "The Comforts of Home" and "The Lambe Shall Enter First," the uncanny characters are not tacitly given any freedom or authority over the house; in these case, they are directly invited to have and to apply it.<sup>28</sup> Against Thomas's opinion, his mother gives Star Drake total freedom, not only inside the house, but also to do her will according to her desires, even if this seems to contradict the woman's Christian morals. Even if Star Drake does not directly fabricate the scene,<sup>29</sup> she uses her influence over the old lady to move freely. Then, that "Imagine it was you" the mother continuously repeats turns from being an expression of pity to be a tool used by Star Drake to control Thomas; something similar is appreciated in Poe's "The Raven" when the scholar does not directly attack the bird for it uses the possibility of being Lenore (or sent by her). On the other hand, all along "The Lambe Shall Enter First," it is possible to appreciate how Rufus Johnson receives more attention from Sheppard than his own son Norton. More specifically, Norton disappears from scene for almost the second half of the short story, only to reappear for the tragic dénouement. As it happened with Thomas's mother, Sheppard also has a justification for behaving as he does, and for somehow trusting the uncanny: "I have nothing to reproach myself with' [...] 'I did more for him than I did for my own child'" (CS 481). Sheppard thinks his good deeds are going to have a proportionate reward; facts will show how this is way far from reality. As seen for Poe's scholar, too, Sheppard cannot directly defend himself from Rufus, for the teenager is the only note of goodness left in that house after his wife's death. If the raven (or Rufus) dies,

Sheppard's wife (or Lenore) will disappear forever, for they are, even with their uncanniness, the principal elements the main characters have now to remember their losses. Both the raven and Rufus, with their cruelty, constantly remind the characters about their lost lovers, even if their main aim is to cause pain, like when Rufus suggests Sheppard's wife is in Hell. However, unlike seen for Poe's poem, Sheppard will have enough strength to get free of Rufus; nevertheless, the teenager's legacy, as the raven's, will stay forever with him, as will be argued below.

Perhaps, one of the most representative common characteristics of all the uncanny elements studied here have is a kind of refrain they carry as their presentation card. Poe clearly explains how he came to compose his raven's refrain "Nevermore." It is the only word the animal will pronounce and the writer explained in detail how it arose in his "The Philosophy of Composition":

I did not fail to perceive immediately that no one had been so universally employed as that of the *refrain*.

[...]

The sound of the *refrain* being thus determined, it became necessary to select a word embodying this sound, and at the same time in the fullest possible keeping with that melancholy I had predetermined as the tone of the poem. In such a search it would have been absolutely impossible to overlook the word "Nevermore." In fact, it was the very first which presented itself (Poe 1984, 18-19).

Even if Poe confessed the election of "Nevermore" was the result of a quasi-mathematical operation, chosen in terms of nature, character and sound, the refrain has become a symbol of much else. "Nevermore" can make reference to the impossibility of Lenore's return, or to many other aspects. Many critics have dealt with the mysterious meaning of the ominous refrain, and almost as many explanations have been given. To present only a few examples, it has been said it expresses the intention of the raven to never leave the scholar's room or, as Roman Jakobson states, it can refer to a multiplicity of meanings:

Given the context of the dialogue the refrain conveys a series of different meanings: you will never forget her, you will never regain peace of mind, you will never again embrace her, I will never leave you! Moreover this same word can function as a name, the symbolic name which the poet bestows upon his nocturnal visitor (Jakobson 1978, 1-2).

Anthony Caputi, who has deeply study Poe's usage of refrains in his poetry, states that the inclusion of "Nevermore" responds to a question of the inner structure of the poem. Then, as Caputi explains, Poe would have written a literary piece with two perfect structures: one visible to the reader and one only perceptible when the inner structure is understood:

In view of these remarks on "The Raven" Poe's claim that the poet must begin with his "dénouement constantly in mind" clarifies another of his ideas on the subject of form. "The Raven" suggests, as

“Dreamland” (1844) and “Ulalume” (1847) clearly show, that Poe was interested in the kind of circular form that can be achieved through a judicious use of refrain, a form wherein the latter part of the poem comes back upon the beginning. The first stanza of “Dreamland” sets forth in concrete terms, however vague and indefinite, the state of mind to be equated with dreaming (Caputi 1953, 174).

It is not my goal to decipher what Edgar Allan Poe wanted (or didn’t want) to mean with his “Nevermore.” It will just be taken using the information the writer himself offer in “The Philosophy of Composition”: it is a refrain that becomes the most peculiar feature of the raven, even more than its external aspect. As it will be argued, Flannery O’Connor also chose to include refrains in her stories to compose the inner structure of them.<sup>30</sup> The selected short stories show examples of these sentences, used in the same ways as Poe’s Plutonic bird did it.

In the case of “Good Country People,” Manley Pointer has his own refrain. As a representative of religion he supposedly is, the sentence he continuously repeats is related to his role as Bibles travelling salesman, but also with the same ambiguous meaning Poe gave to the one in his poem: “You ain’t saved?” What is that supposed to mean coming from a person like Manley Pointer, with no sense of morality at all? If we go to the final scene of the story, the wanderer confesses what his true faith is: “I hope you don’t think,’ he said in a lofty indignant tone, ‘that I believe in that crap!’” (CS 290). His only beliefs are based on his capacity to travel around the country and to trick innocent, disabled girls, as Joy/Hulga is revealed to be, despite her PhD. Manley Pointer’s refrain (with the macabre characteristic that surrounds this personage) can be interpreted as a warning to Joy/Hulga before he develops his perverse intention of depriving her of her wooden leg (a lie to achieve his goal, as O’Connor’s psychopaths do);<sup>31</sup> it can also be seen as a statement, for her higher intelligence will not save her when she has to face real life, paradoxically represented by the agent of the uncanny. Finally, it can be used in its more religious sense, being Pointer a devil in disguise and Joy/Hulga a victim who has fallen into temptation by going with him to the barn in the woods.

Probably, the most surprising case among the selected stories is that from “The Comforts of Home.” There, Star Drake is almost completely silent for the whole story, until she pronounces a couple of sentences just before the outcome of the story. However, even if she does not talk, that does not mean she does not produce any sound. Indeed, her “Nevermore” is not a word or a sentence, but her laugh: “With a shriek of laughter she ran to meet the dog” (CS 383); “The back door slammed and the girl’s laugh shot up from the kitchen through the back hall, up the stairwell and into his room, making for him like a bolt of electricity” (CS 383); “The girl’s laughter rang upward a second time and Thomas winced” (CS 384). Throughout the story, this (for Thomas) annoying sound is repeated, being the only way in which the girl communicates with the outer world. As a well-constructed “Nevermore,” that laugh also shows a high dose of ambiguity: it is not very expectable to find that sign of joy and happiness coming from someone with such a dark past as Star Drake’s. She is presented as a tragic character, but her expression and most peculiar feature belong to the comic genre, showing a mixture of genres only masters like Poe or O’Connor can

achieve. Besides, Star Drake's laugh can be interpreted as her weapon to construct the scenario for the dénouement she wants. It has been said that Thomas is a historian and his a respectable Southern family, so seriousness and not humorousness is expected by him and his readers to be found in his life. Then Star Drake, as an earthly raven (in parallel with Poe's bird), is perceived as the destruction of his world, as it happens in the poem: even if, potentially, neither the raven nor Star Drake can harm the other characters, they are perceived as a menace.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, in "The Lame Shall Enter First," Flannery O'Connor drew the least ambiguous of her refrains. If it has been seen as a common characteristics that the previous uncanny characters did not give a clear meaning along with their sentence, Rufus Johnson in shockingly and unnecessarily clear with his: "'Satan,' he said. 'He has me in his power'" (CS 450). The teenager repeats it all along the story, and Sheppard had already heard that when he invited Rufus to live with him and his son, so he knows something evil is growing inside the backwoods' boy. Rufus does not try to cheat anyone, he presents himself as he is: evil and burdened with the hideous education his grandfather gave to him. Through this difference, Flannery O'Connor builds a human raven who is even more destructive than Poe's bird. Truth and fact, when not paid attention to or believed, can be as dangerous as the intellectual worlds.

Finally, the last thing Poe's poem and O'Connor's stories have in common is how they structure the outcomes of the plots. The dénouement of "The Raven" is probably one of the most powerful images in the history of Western literature:

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, *still* is sitting  
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;  
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,  
And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;  
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor  
Shall be lifted – nevermore! (Poe 2000, 369).

As seen for the meaning of the refrain, scholars have widely discussed the meaning of this last stanza. "Why is the soul of the scholar trapped on the raven's shadow?," "Why does the narrator not refer to the scholar's body, but only to his soul?," "Why did Poe return to demonic reference at the end of the poem?," etc., are only a few examples of the questions brought into the debate. Once again, Sérgio Luiz Prado Bellei offers an explanation, assessing that the two stanzas of the poem, by suggesting more than showing, offer a view of the scholar's mind, being the raven a mean he has to project the memory of Lenore (and the drama of her loss) into the present (Prado Bellei 1989, 53-54).

Perhaps, the most interesting detail of the last stanza for the development of the argument of this essay is the image of the raven standing on the bust of Pallas. As the reader will know, Pallas was the Greek goddess of wisdom and war, patron of Athens. Then, by depicting a black Plutonic bird over it, Poe creates a Gothic image: darkness, the unknown, stands and prevails over reason,

represented in the scholar who “shall be lifted – nevermore.” As it will be explained, Flannery O’Connor chose this image to draw the outcomes of her three stories under discussion here.<sup>33</sup>

As previously mentioned, the last scene of “Good Country People” takes place in a barn in the middle of the woods. The nature of this place locates the outcome of this story on an elevated level. However, this elevation will not be the definitive assimilation of Poe’s last stanza. After Manley Pointer has displayed the content of his valise (“[...] a pocket flask of whisky, a pack of cards, and a small blue box with printing on it” [CS 289]) and has stolen Joy/Hulga’s wooden leg, he leaves the farm, leaving the girl completely abandoned and with no possibility of easily returning to her home:

“Give me my leg!” she screeched. He jumped up so quickly that she barely saw him sweep the cards and the blue box into the Bible and throw the Bible into the valise. She saw him grab the leg and then she saw it for an instant slanted forlornly across the inside of the suitcase with a Bible at either side of its opposite ends. He slammed the lid shut and snatched up the valise and swung it down the hole and then stepped through himself (CS 290).

This scene represents a change in the main orientation of the spatial coordinate of the story. Until this moment, the key passages of the story had taken place horizontally, with their culmination on the young couple lying on the hay of the barn. However, now, once the wanderer has achieved his goal, Flannery O’Connor decides to change the dominant coordinate to vertical. This is the first similarity with the last stanza of “The Raven;” the second and most prominent one would come from the image of a standing Manley Pointer, a position Joy/Hulga cannot reach now. So, as seen for the raven over the bust of Pallas, O’Connor depicts a new uncanny archetype of the unknown who stands over reason, represented in a Joy/Hulga (a new scholar) who, like the protagonist of the poem (and more physically than him) “shall be lifted – nevermore.”

A similar situation is presented at the end of “The Comforts of Home.” After Thomas has lost his sanity and has heard the voice of his dead father, he decides to do something to get free of Star Drake. With the complicity of the sheriff, Thomas develops his plan. However, things go terribly bad for him. When he has to face the situation, his mind goes blank and he shoots the gun he had used to implicate Star Drake:

Thomas fired. The blast was like a sound meant to bring an end to evil in the world. Thomas heard it as a sound that would shatter the laughter of sluts until all shrieks were stilled and nothing was left to disturb the peace of perfect order.

The echo died away in waves. Before the last one had faded, Farebrother opened the door and put his head inside the hall. His nose wrinkled. His expression for some few seconds was that of a man unwilling to admit surprise. His eyes were clear as glass, reflecting the scene. The old lady lay on the floor between the girl and Thomas (CS 403-04).



As deduced from this quotation, Thomas ends by killing his mother instead of the uncanny character. Then, the doubt arises: is it possible to think that this was Star Drake's plan from the beginning? Being this true or not, what can assured is that the image is, once again, similar to Poe's last stanza: the uncanny, Star Drake, stands as "morally superior" to the representative of reason, the educated Thomas, who is discovered by the sheriff when killing his mother. Once again, reason is defeated by the forces of darkness, moral darkness in this case.

However, the most outstanding example of O'Connor's retelling of the last stanza of "The Raven" comes from the end of "The Lame Shall Enter First." After Sheppard has quitted trying to civilize Rufus, he "remembers" he had a son. However, it is too late, because Rufus's malign influence has already accomplished its task, and Norton has to pay for this father's sins:

The light was on Norton's room but the bed was empty. He turned and clashed up the attic stairs and at the top reeled back like a man on the edge of a pit. The tripod had fallen and the telescope lay on the floor. A few feet over it, the child hung in a jungle of shadows, just below the beam from which he had launched his flight into space (CS 482).

A tragedy has finally occurred; another possibility would be difficult bearing in mind Sheppard's attitude. However, beyond the tragic sense of this dénouement, it is important here how the scene is constructed. The child has hung himself in a desperate attempt to go back to his dead mother. Beneath him, the last present from his father, a telescope, stands. This gift had been given to Norton (and to Rufus) to awaken his interest in space exploration (so, in science). However, Rufus's influence has it turned into an obscurantist object, used by the child to seek for his mother in Heaven. This, along with a previous affirmation stated by Rufus ("Right now you'd go where she is,' [...] 'but if you live long enough, you'll go to hell'" [CS 462]), convince the child of which is the only way of returning with his mother. Then, what O'Connor depicted and the reader gets is a child influenced by a person who said continuously "Satan has me in his power" to kill himself, hanging over an object designed to serve the science. Once again, darkness stands over the bust of Pallas, over the realm of reason.

## Conclusions

The previous pages show in which way Flannery O'Connor received and influence by one of the most notable works by Edgar Allan Poe: "The Raven." Many of her stories showed how she was a master of retelling, taking examples from several previous literary traditions. According to her own testimonies, the American Renaissance was one of the most strongly influential periods from which she received inspiration for her own compositions. The analyzed short stories by O'Connor recreate some structural parts of the narrative line of Poe's poem, making them a good case of "literary transference". Even if this influence is not explicit, the mentioned examples demonstrate how O'Connor used images, characters and ideas from "The Raven" in order to write "Good Country People," "The Comforts of Home," and "The Lame Shall Enter First." The conflict between science

and the unknown, the usage of the uncanny or the introduction of a misunderstood and lonely intellectual personage are only a few samples of how O'Connor attempted (and succeeded) to recreate Poe's most famous poem. The forgotten lore Joy/Hulga studies, the refrain of Star Drake or Norton hanging above a telescope (like the raven over the bust of Pallas) are the little homage a master of the 20<sup>th</sup> century-South made to her 19<sup>th</sup> century predecessor.

It is true that the production of Flannery O'Connor (as it has happened with Poe's) has been address from countless perspectives (gender studies, postmodern theory, racial studies, religious studies...). However, the relevance of this essay rests in how it has approached a case of literary influence. Not only example of the included texts have been pointed out, but how all this interrelates. Saying that "The Raven" is present in the production of Flannery O'Connor would be close to not saying anything; however, the true importance of that presence needs to be studied down to the last detail. This is the particular relevance of this article, and whet it joins the current debate of Comparative Literature.

A last field in which the relation between these two major authors is noticed (and which has been pointed out throughout the essay) is the preoccupation of both Edgar Allan Poe and Flannery O'Connor for theorizing about short narrative. "The Philosophy of Composition" is well known, and has been analyzed (like Poe's stories) from many different perspectives. However, the collection *Mystery and Manners* is also a good homage O'Connor could pay the Bostonian through the references to him and his works that can be found there. Essays like "The Nature and Aim of Fiction" or "Writing Short Stories" prove that the description of how Poe conceived his raven (as explained in "The Philosophy of Composition") was also in the mind of O'Connor when she was composing her particular literary universe.

### **Endnotes:**

1. This study has been partially possible thanks to the Research Project "Edgar A. Poe on-line. Texto e imagen" [Edgar A. Poe On-line. Texts and Images], sponsored by the Spanish Ministry of Science (Ref. HAR2015-64580-P). I would also like to express my gratitude to Margarita Rigal-Aragón, PhD (Associate Professor of English at the Universidad of Castilla-La Mancha –Spain–), for her suggestions on the first draft of this paper, and to the University of Limerick (specially to David Coughlan, PhD, chair of the Irish Association for American Studies and Head of English), because the final version of this article was completed during the months I spent there.
2. In reference to H. P. Lovecraft's novel *At the Mountains of Madness* (1936)
3. In reference to Stephen King's recent novel *Mr. Mercedes* (2014).
4. As demonstrated by Connie Ann Kirk, among others.
5. This particular way of spelling the title of the collection was introduced by Flannery O'Connor in her letter, the actual spelling being *Humorous Tales*.
6. Abbreviations used for Flannery O'Connor's works:  
*CS: Complete Stories.*  
*HB: The Habit of Being.*
7. For more information about the relation between Flannery O'Connor and Edgar Allan Poe see, for instance the recent Doctoral Dissertation by José Manuel Correoso-Rodenas (included in the

references), in which the influence of Gothic literature (particularly American Gothic) in Flannery O'Connor's fiction is explored in detail.

8. It is true that this essay could be extended to include some other examples by O'Connor, like for instance "Wildcat," "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," or "The Enduring Chill." However, I have decided only to include "The Comforts of Home" and "The Lame Shall Enter First" because they share more characteristics with "The Raven" than any of the previous. Besides, the plotlines of these stories, as it will be seen, was conceived following a very similar structure to the one used by Poe in his poem. Nevertheless, when needed, quotations or examples from stories different from the discussed will be used.

This said, it should be clarified that the inclusion of "The Lame Shall Enter First," with all the differences this story has in relation to the others (as it will be pointed out) has been a decision in order to show how O'Connor used different means to rewrite Poe's poem. As influence is not a simple process, the variations it can have justify the inclusion of this "different" story.

9. Indeed, in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), the past and the curse over the illegitimate tenants of the castle is what triggers the plot even before the novel is started.

For a more accurate analysis of the importance of the repressed within the Gothic, see Clemens, Valdine. *The Return of the Repressed. Gothic Horror from The Castle of Otranto to Alien*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999, or Steven Hall's Introduction to Mike Carey and Peter Gross's *The Unwritten: Dead Man's Knock* (2011).

10. In a very strong resemblance to those maidens of the Gothic novel that were imprisoned, from the earliest examples of Horace Walpole to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892).
11. At this point, it would be interesting to turn to Mark McGurl's work, who expresses this crucial moment of personal ambiguity for O'Connor with the following words: "She liked to quip that she had been 'saved' from a career as a creative writing teacher by the illness that forced her to live at home with her mother, and thought of workshop discussions as being "generally comprised in equal parts of ignorance, flattery, and spite" (Mystery 86)" (McGurl 2007, 529). Eileen Pollack has also manifested in this respect: "To writers who teach to earn their living, Flannery O'Connor has long represented the benefits that accrue to writers who refuse to teach (or, in O'Connor's case, are prevented from doing so by illness). Her continued exposure to irritating southern matrons and Jesus-haunted back- woods preachers kept her fiction gritty and eccentric in ways that might have been impossible if she had remained in the academy" (McGurl 2007, 546).
12. See, for instance, what she says in her *Prayer Journal*: "Dear God, In a way I got a good punishment for my lack of charity to Mr. Rothburg last year. He came back at me today like a tornado which while it didn't hurt me too much yet ruined my show. All this is about charity. Dear Lord please make my mind vigilant about that. I say many many too many uncharitable things about people everyday. I say them because they make me look clever. Please help me to realize practically how cheap this is. I have nothing to be proud of yet myself. I am stupid, quite as stupid as the people I ridicule. Please help me to stop this selfishness because I love you, dear God. I don't want to be all excuses though. I am not much. Please help me to do Your Word oh Lord" (O'Connor 2013, 19).
13. Following Mark McGurl once again, we have a testimony about one of these "complicated relationships" Flannery O'Connor had with some of her colleagues: "In a letter dated 2 April 1960, O'Connor took a moment to backstab her friend Robie Macauley, who had been with her at the Iowa Writers' Workshop in the late 1940s, when both were getting their Master of Fine Arts degrees there, and whose opinions she normally respected. Although he would soon co-author a textbook called *Technique in Fiction* (1964), Macauley must at some point have expressed approval of a writer from the previous generation whose disregard for technique had become notorious, an object lesson in the badness that can result from uncontrolled 'self-expression': 'As for R.M.,' she wrote to another friend, 'he is a great admirer of Thomas Wolfe & in my opinion anybody that admires Thomas Wolfe

can be expected to like good fiction only by accident' (*Habit* 385). The combined effect of Wolfe's experiences at an innovative private day school in Asheville, and later at the University of North Carolina, and finally as a helplessly undisciplined student playwright in George Pierce Baker's fabled Drama 47 Workshop at Harvard, had been to convince him that the central task of the literary artist must be to defend the sovereignty of his genius against any forces that might presume to diminish or contain it" (McGurl 2007, 530; emphasis in the original).

14. Also memorable is the trip she took with her mother and some fellow Catholics to Lourdes and Rome. When reaching the French shrine, her opinions deserve to be highlighted, since them really fall within the category of the grotesque that impregnates all her production. In a letter to "A" dated 19 April 1958, O'Connor writes about a nun who she befriended: "She hopes that what I will get out of the Lourdes trip is a vocation to belong to the Marist Third Order. All I can say is boy, that would be an appropriate penance but I hope I'll be spared" (*HB* 279); later on, in another letter to "A" dated in Rome 5 May 1958, O'Connor goes on with this argument: "... Lourdes was not as bad as I expected. I took the bath. From a selection of bad motives, such as to prevent any bad conscience for not having done it, and because it seemed at the time that it must be what was wanted of me. I went early in the morning. Only about 40 ahead of me so the water looked pretty clean. They pass around the water for 'les malades' to drink & everybody drinks out of the same cup. As somebody said, the miracle is that the place don't bring epidemics. Well, I did it all and with very bad grace" (*HB* 280).
15. The interesting relationship O'Connor had with her mother has widely referred to by several critics. One example is Louise Westling, who in 1978 wrote "Yet there is at least one distinctive element in O'Connor's fiction which ultimately calls attention to her motivation as a female and leads us outside the work for explanation. This is the repeated mother-daughter pattern which seems a disturbing force often at odds with the clear purpose of a story" (Westling 1978, 510). More recently, Gretchen Dobrott-Bernard has said: "In 1966, two years after the author's death from lupus erythematosus, Stanley Edgar Hyman referred to her unique portrayal of the mother/daughter dyad as 'the duo of practical mother and dreamy daughter on a dairy farm' (30). In fact, in the writer's depiction of these fictional families, it is difficult for the reader to overlook the allusions to her imposed retirement to 'Andalusia,' her mother's farm in Milledgeville, Georgia. Readers familiar with her written correspondence and her biography will find that many elements coincide. O'Connor's widowed mother, Regina O'Connor, ran her farm with the help of tenant workers, while her daughter wrote. Although O'Connor does not single out a Regina prototype in her fiction, parallels can be easily traced. Her fictional farm widows, like Regina, are concerned with appearances, hard work, common sense and being lady-like (Nichols 27). Several of her stories share these features, and in one of them, 'Good Country People,' biographical coincidences are remarkable" (Dobrott-Bernard 2004, 71-72).
16. See, for instance, the studies by John F. Adams, or Byrd Howell Granger.
17. The "School of Memory" refers to a trend in Literary Criticism and Theory that is based in some previous theories, such as Post-Structuralism, New Historicism, Marxism and Psychoanalysis. The postulates of this trend expose how a text is not temporally isolated, but it is a palimpsest made with all the previous texts belonging to the same tradition, and also of all the previous readings the reader has done (for more information about "Palimpsestism," see Caeners 2015; for information about how a kind of palimpsestism has also been developed in Gothic Literature, see Hogle, Jerrold E.. "Introduction: the Gothic in western culture." *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. Ed. Jerrold E. Hogle. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. 1-20.). This school also deals with the possibility of a reader who creates new memories out of the readings, as if they were experiences. Also, the trend of 'social memory' developed mainly by Paul Connerton (1989) deserves to be mentioned, understood as a communal memory that includes folklore, mythology, tradition, and literature. So, due to the particularities of its history and its cultural implications, the South of the

United States would as suitable to apply this example as it is Ireland, where the model has been displayed by Jarlath Kileen (2014).

18. In reference to Joy/Hulga, Laura Behling widens the question when disserting about the meaning of the scholar's disability: "Although initially portraying Hulga as the character who is 'ugly' both physically and emotionally, what is at stake for the reader throughout the text is to determine what it means to be 'ugly' and to which of the characters 'ugliness' applies" (Behling 2006, 88).
  19. Although he can be considered an important author due to the influence his works would have on later authors such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, he can certainly not be considered as having the same relevance as the "founders" of modern philosophy (René Descartes, John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, David Hume...) in terms of the amount of authors and works he has influenced. While Descartes, Locke, etc., are today considered key philosophers to understand the modern world, Malebranche has been relegated to an academic background, having been John Norris (also quite obscure himself) his main disciple.
- In relation to Malebranche and his theories about "the truth," Martin Heidegger needs to be mentioned. Besides being a contemporary of O'Connor, his theories on the essence of being (or Dasein) are interesting inheritors of those of Malebranche. It could be stated that Joy/Hulga has also been reading the German philosophy of Heidegger according to many of her affirmations, or even to her idea of Manly Pointer being "good country people": "Her voice when she spoke had an almost pleading sound. 'Aren't you,' she murmured, 'aren't you just good country people?' (CS 290).
20. When introducing the character, O'Connor's narrator reproduces Mrs. Hopewell (Joy/Hulga's mother) thoughts. A description the lady gives of her daughter's condition is: "You could say, 'My daughter is a nurse,' or 'My daughter is a schoolteacher,' or even, 'My daughter is a chemical engineer.' You could not say, 'My daughter is a philosopher.' That was something that had ended with the Greeks and Romans" (CS 276). This fragment goes back to an argument used by O'Connor when dealing with Poe: "People have quit doing it", as seen for the quotation from *Wise Blood* cited above.
  21. This concept of "isolation" probably deserves a further explanation. Even though most of Flannery O'Connor's characters do not live in solitude (as the character of "The Raven" does) due to the fact that they have relatives, it cannot be asserted that this circumstance can make them look less isolated. Their families are not usually depicted as a solace, but (often) as a source of despair.
  22. However, the relation of the uncanny with Flannery O'Connor's works has also been explored when referred to the comic and grotesque aspects of her stories by critics such as Éric Savoy, who assesses: "At once wry and dry, O'Connor's comic intuition is most at home in the *unheimlich*, the uncanny, which is to say that her work depends vitally on the *ludicrous*" (Savoy 2016, 135; emphasis in the original).
  23. See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: "No one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.' Now God's Spirit, who reveals God, makes known to us Christ, his Word, his living Utterance, but the Spirit does not speak of himself. The Spirit who 'has spoken through the prophets' makes us hear the Father's Word, but we do not hear the Spirit himself. We know him only in the movement by which he reveals the Word to us and disposes us to welcome him in faith. The Spirit of truth who 'unveils' Christ to us 'will not speak on his own.' Such properly divine self-effacement explains why 'the world cannot receive (him), because it neither sees him nor knows him,' while those who believe in Christ know the Spirit because he dwells with them (available at [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_\\_\\_P1Z.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P1Z.HTM)).
  24. It is true that Thomas does not voluntarily allow Star Drake to live under his roof; however, the decision is made by his moral authority (his mother) and he cannot do anything but complain.
  25. It would be interesting to study the influence of the folk tradition of the "enlutado" (griefstricken) in the outcome of "The Raven." The "enlutado" is a myth very popular in many places o Europe and

Latin America. This quasi-magical being is said to absorb light and to be dressed completely in black, as the raven certainly is. It is also believed to confront its victims with all their sins, turning them mad or provoking their suicides.

26. Notice how the author uses a gothic reference in this passage. An elevated barn can easily be assimilated to a tower, one of the key scenarios of classical gothic. Then, it can be easily deduced that chances of succeeding are not very high for Joy/Hulga, the maiden.
27. See endnote 17.
28. Once again, Lewis's *The Monk* would be an outstanding precedent within Gothic.
29. Although her intentions are never clear.
30. However, Flannery O'Connor was not the only 20<sup>th</sup> century Southern author who took inspiration in Poe to use this literary and phonetic resource. According to Sarah Ford, Eudora Welty (1909-2001) also used it in her novel *The Optimist's Daughter*: "In *The Optimist's Daughter* Welty performs a different kind of re-writing, focusing this time on gender and targeting a more specific allusion, Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Raven'. Poe's use of rhyme, alliteration and repetition creates the gothic tone for the poem's subject of a man grieving his lost love and imagining that a raven croaking 'nevermore' means that he will be forever trapped in his sorrows. Poe explains in his essay 'The Philosophy of Composition' that his decision in writing 'The Raven' were not just logical but inevitable. If 'Beauty is the sole legitimate province of the poem', then it follows that the appropriate tone is 'Melancholy' and the topic must be 'Death', which leads Poe to his 'obvious' subject: 'the death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world' [...]" (Ford 2016, 440).
31. Let's remember the grandmother in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find."
32. Besides, in this story a second refrain can be found. It is the already mentioned and explained sentence pronounced by Thomas's mother "Imagine it was you." This sentence, as it happens with Star Drake's laugh, is not planned in the serious and anodyne life of the local historian: he cannot be in Star's place, because he is a moral-intelligent man and a respectable member of his community, son of a deceased judge.
33. Even if not included in this essay due to plot disparities, Flannery O'Connor's "Wildcat" also has a last scene resembling the last stanza of "The Raven." After a life expecting, Old Gabriel gets the second encounter with the wildcat he desires: "He was on his feet now. 'Lord don't want me with no wildcat mark.' He was moving toward the cat hole. Across on the river bank the Lord was waiting on him with a troupe of angels and Golden vestments and stand there with the Lord and the angels, judging life. Won't no nigger for fifty miles fitter to judge than him. Pick. He stopped. He smelled it right outside, noising the hole. He had to climb onto something! What he going toward it for? He had to get on something high! There was a shelf nailed over the chimney and he turn wildly and fell against a chair and shoved it up to the fireplace. He caught hold of the shelf and pulled himself onto the chair and sprang up and backwards and felt the narrow shelf board under him for an instant and then felt it sag and jerked his feet up and felt it crack somewhere from the wall. His stomach flew inside him and stopped hard and the shelf board fell across his feet and the rung of the chair hit against his head and then, after a second of stillness, he heard a low, gasping animal cry wail over two hills and fade past him; then snarls, tearing short, furious, through the pain wails. Gabriel sat stiff on the floor" (CS 31). Even if Old Gabriel is certainly not a scholar, he is a human being, so an intelligent creature. Somehow, then, this outcome also depicts the image of the raven standing over the bust of Pallas, as the wildcat, coming from the woods, symbol of darkness, the supernatural and the unknown has presumably killed the man.

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